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HUN AND HUMANIST

The political alliance of America with England and France, which has revealed the essential identity of American national ideals with those of the allies, stands out in somewhat startling contrast to the academic relations that Americans within the past few decades have established with European countries. When, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the settlement of the United States had been practically completed, industrial and commercial development had made great advance, and the increasing pressure of a population augmented by vast numbers of immigrants began to bring out social inequalities and industrial unrest, so that there came about a modification of conditions under which a purely individualistic nation like America could flourish, Americans began to turn to the more complex and elaborate civilization of Europe for light on the problems that were becoming common to both Europe and America. Coincident with this, and a part of the same movement, was the awakening of an interest in higher education in America, which resulted in the remarkable development of educational machinery, exemplified particularly in the rise of the American state university. The feeling of a need for a more perfect social organization and for the scientific knowledge requisite for a more complex industrial system, and expanding opportunities in the academic field, drove American students in increasing numbers to the universities of Europe. For a number of reasons the great majority of these went to Germany; so that the latter decades of the nineteenth century as well as the first decade of the twentieth might be called the era of predominant German influence upon American thought. To set forth some reasons why our students went to Germany instead of to England or France, and to determine the nature of the German influence upon America, is the purpose of this article.

In their search for enlightenment American students as a class avoided England probably because of the feeling that England had little to offer America. What was good in the English ideal, self-reliance and reverence for the individual, the early colonists

had brought over; and what was bad, the tyranny and inequality of English society, they had largely avoided. Besides, there still existed a strong anti-British prejudice, the legacy of the Revolution. The choice of the mentor of American enlightenment, then, lay between Germany and France.

The notion one forms of the French character from books is of a people with strong social instincts and great powers of social cohesion, in whom rationality predominates over sentiment, who clarify tradition and convention with reason, who subordinate the individual to the group or institution, and who have achieved a wide diffusion of intelligence in its general and humane aspects. Of the Germans one is apt to think of energy, of enthusiasm approximating violence, of sentiment, and yet of patience and meticulous industry in application to facts and details. But it is questionable whether the character of peoples is determined by inherent national traits. Are they not more probably the product of their time and of geographical and historical circumstance?

Pursuing this speculation, we may conceive the barbarian as a man of robust health, of abounding energy, of strong emotions, and of capability for intense enthusiasms, but given to sentimentality, moodiness, and egotism, and susceptible to superstition and illusion. The more civilized man is of calmer and more equable temper, urbane, civil, reasonable, just, self-controlled, and resigned. He is more impersonal and objective in his attitude, is devoted to general principles and ideas, and possesses mature powers of judgment. In line with this it would appear that the qualities of the French are those of a mature and advanced civilization; of the Germans, those that result from grafting some of the virtues of a mature civilization upon a stock the qualities of which are still to a great extent those of the barbarian; and of the English, at least of the nineteenth-century English, those of a civilization somewhere in its development between that of the German and the French.

The qualities of the French, if we may dismiss inherent racial attributes as subordinate, may be accounted for by the historical and geographical position of France. Situated next to Italy and bordering both on the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, she became the medium through which the Græco-Roman civilization

was passed on to modern Europe and America. Being conquered by the Romans and adopting a form of the Latin language, she was occupied in assimilating the older civilization through several centuries in which the peoples of Britain and Germany were hardly touched by its influence. If the four conditions of a mature civilization may be enumerated as institutions and traditions, a national spirit due to the achievement of political unity, a considerable time in which the beneficent effect of institutions and traditions may permeate society, and finally liberty, democracy is some form, it is clear that France has possessed all of these conditions. To these may be added her failure as a colonizer in competition with Great Britain; for emigration, while preserving individualism, did away, as in England, with the necessity of the more equable social organization which was imperative in countries where, as in the case of France, an increasing population had to be accommodated to static natural resources.

In contrast to France, Germany, at least in the somewhat arbitrary perspective of the present, seems the victim of a series of historical misfortunes. Her later contact with civilization and the foreshortened period within which her institutions and traditions could affect her people, the fact that for years she suffered the blight of being the battle-ground of the contending rulers and nationalities of Europe, the late date—1870—in which she finally attained nationality and political unity, leaving but a scant space of a few years for her to assimilate civilization before taking her place as one of the major powers, all this tended to render her an immature leader in world affairs. Besides, liberty of thought, democracy in the sense that is familiar to the French, English, and Americans, Germany has not even yet attained. In the field of emigration and colonization Germany was also too late. Both before and after the realization of her national unity she had a large surplus of population to send abroad, but there were practically no opportunities for colonization; England and Spain had already appropriated most of the desirable lands. The effects upon England and France—the development of Anglo-Saxon individualism through emigration and the French achievement of a rational and a democratic social organi-

zation through the necessity of accomodating their own surplus population—were both largely lost to Germany through her period of heavy emigration.

The fact, however, that concurrently with the achievement of nationality Germany was victorious in two foreign wars served as a powerful stimulus to the progress of German civilization. The nation awoke to self-consciousness and a sense of power, so that there ensued a period of rapid progress comparable almost to the age of Pericles and the subsequent years in Athens and the age of Elizabeth in England.

In these periods of stimulation of national life nations devote their exuberant energies to achievement in those lines of effort that are especially characteristic of the civilization of their time. In Athens the quickened mental life was expressed in literature, art, and philosophy; in the England of Elizabeth the exuberance of the people found an outlet in literature, the lyric and the drama. The period of German awakening was synchronous with the dominance of science in the thought of the world; and possibly in consequence of this, the achievement of the Germans was characteristically in the field of science. This was not without its dangers both to the symmetry of German civilization and the peace of the world; for the scientific movement in its beginning was frankly agnostic and naturalistic; and in its development it has worked rather consistently for success in the sphere of the practical, the economic, and the materialistic.

Somewhere within this period of German leadership, the science and learning of Germany, under the domination of an autocratic and aristocratic form of government, was gradually made an instrument for promoting the imperialistic designs of the rulers, with the political consequences of which the world is tragically familiar. But the influence of German scholarship upon America has been that of science without imperialism.

In view of the foregoing, it may be more obvious why the American student of the latter decades of the nineteenth century gravitated to Germany instead of to England or France. The quest of that which should offset the one-sidedness of Anglo-Saxon individualism, an anti-British prejudice in many cases, an academic preparation inadequate for graduate study at Oxford or Cambridge but sufficient for candidacy for the German Ph.D. degree, a desire to study under many of the acknowledged

leaders of scientific thought, the dominant tendency of the age, and possibly the affinity of one unlicked-cub civilization for another, sent the American to Germany instead of to England. And for much the same reasons he chose the exuberant and aggressive specialized learning of Germany in preference to the more sedate but harmonious culture of France.

The good effects of German scholarship upon America are too well known for present comment; they are the benefits of the scientific temper and of scientific achievement; and they have doubtless done much to strengthen America as a champion of democracy and a foe to German imperialistic aggression; but the subject of this paper is rather the bad than the good effects of Germany upon America. And the bad effects were the natural outcome of the influence of a partly civilized people suddenly acquiring scientific efficiency and leadership without the basis of a permeative traditional culture and the humanistic perspective that could adjust natural science to a well-ordered and harmonious system. In fine, Germany is and has been suffering from precocity in civilization. She has tried to cram within a much foreshortened period a ration that France has been masticating, digesting, and absorbing for centuries. Germany has not had time or all the conditions for assimilating civilization. Her people still exhibit the characteristics of our theoretical barbarian. We have well-authenticated evidence of their irritable self-esteem, sentimentality, and violence, and of their capacity for self-deception. They are characteristically deficient in the power of making sane generalizations; in a word, they lack judgment, a common trait of the precocious.

The effect of this unbalanced temper upon learning and scholarship has shown itself in the emphasis on the material over the ideal, on the practical over the theoretical, on the detailed fact over the general principle. Specialism is pushed so far that hypotheses and laws are lost to view in the welter of details and laboratory experiments. All subjects are approached by the scientific method, even where that method is least applicable. Literature is subordinated to philology. Analysis of character and ideas, the tracing of larger relations, is ignored; and poetry is often regarded merely as so much material for grammatical investigations. Source-studies and problems of authorship are undertaken of literature that is not read by the public or studied in the classroom. Historical investigations end in the discov-

ery of the isolated fact, without suggesting any principle or correlation or applicability to the present or future. As one observer has phrased it, "The assimilation of fact, however important, sinks into insignificance beside the discovery of fact, however trivial." The greatest aggregation of American scholars, the Modern Language Association of America, assembles annually either to tell or to hear some new thing; but the specialism of the articles that are subsequently published is so narrow that but few, one is informed, are read even by the members, who support the publications. Indeed, under this extreme specialization and quest of the forgotten or the novel fact, American scholarship has entered upon a period of diminishing return. Intellectual coöperation, at least in the field of cultural studies, is well-nigh out of the question: so that our modern university has been aptly defined as "an aggregation of infinitely repellent particles." In fine, learning, the prime function of which, in our view, is to civilize, has degenerated into pedantry; it is a sort of conventual diversion or emulation in some secluded cloister of the intellect; and in many of the works of its most prominent exemplars has scarcely more vital relation to life and society than have billiards and chess. In view of these facts, one would not, I believe, make an unwarranted inference if he traced much of this confusion of intellectual values in America to the one-sided and inharmonious scholarship and civilization of Germany.

That this inference is justifiable may be argued, also, from recent events in world politics. The emphasis placed by the Germans on detailed facts to the exclusion of generalizations and the cultivation of judgment, or perhaps their devotion to philological science to the exclusion of imaginative literature has contributed toward their inability to know either themselves or others. They have exhibited an egotism that borders on egomania. They have shown such an incapacity for understanding other peoples that they have recently suffered a number of decisive diplomatic defeats. This may be due singly or collectively to immaturity of judgment, excess of egocentric sentiment, or a lack of the imaginative sympathy that is requisite for psychological insight and just estimate of others. At any rate, it is probably due to some phase of immaturity of German civilization, to their subordination of humanism and culture to a worship of the materialized fact.

Of recent years, however, the American academic world has been gradually passing out of the dispensation of German Kultur. The traditions of British culture, which belonged to America almost as much as to England, and the intellectual intercourse between Great Britain and America, especially such as exists between the generally cultivated public of the two countries, have tended to loosen the intellectual bonds between Germany and America. The same process has gone on somewhat tentatively and cautiously in our colleges and universities, where German scholarship had intrenched itself firmly on the commanding heights of academic authority. But the war has at last opened the eyes of our university administrators and senior professors to the crudeness and inharmoniousness of the spirit of the present German civilization. Our Germanized universities are entering upon a transition, and there are signs of dissatisfaction within our Germanized graduate schools. At least, the process is under way, and apparently the direction of progress is along the line of its further growth. Already it has been proposed that we discontinue our system of exchange professorships with Germany and establish closer academic relations with Britain and France. To anyone who has followed the conduct of the British people in the war, who is in touch with recent British politics and literature, and who has noted the lucid and impersonal pronouncements of their publicists and writers upon contemporary world politics, it is evident that the civilizing process has of late years been unusually rapid in England. A nation that has voluntarily abandoned an achieved imperialism, that has listened with æsthetic approval, yet undisturbed moral equilibrium, to the spontaneous overflowings of the junker spirit of Kipling, and that has won a reputation all over the world for justice and fair dealing, is a more worthy subject of emulation than the Germany of yesterday or to-day. France, who has always been in the van of civilization, may now assume her rightful place as a guide toward the more organic world society of the future. And possibly, after the war, if America wishes to show her magnanimity and the liberality of her resources, she might make an academic investment of world-wide import by establishing scholarships for teachable Teutonic youths at the universities of France.

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